

BLACK♦STARS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE



written by

**JIM HASKINS
ELEANORA TATE
CLINTON COX
BRENDA WILKINSON**

JIM HASKINS, GENERAL EDITOR



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

BLACK♦STARS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE



written by

**JIM HASKINS
ELEANORA TATE
CLINTON COX
BRENDA WILKINSON**

JIM HASKINS, GENERAL EDITOR



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

This book is printed on acid-free paper. ☈

Copyright © 2002 by Jim Haskins. All rights reserved
Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York.
Published simultaneously in Canada

Design and production by Navta Associates, Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, email: permcoordinator@wiley.com.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information about our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

ISBN 0-471-21152-4

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments,</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Introduction,</i>	<i>1</i>
W. E. B. Du Bois,	5
W. C. Handy,	13
Philip A. Payton Jr.,	19
Jessie Redmon Fauset,	23
Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle,	28
Oscar Micheaux,	34
Gertrude "Ma" Rainey,	39
James Van Der Zee,	43
Marcus Garvey,	48
Francis Hall Johnson,	54
Zora Neale Hurston,	59
Augusta Savage,	65
Bessie Smith,	70
Paul Robeson,	75
Duke Ellington,	80
Thomas Andrew Dorsey,	86
Louis Armstrong,	91
Langston Hughes,	95
Dorothy West,	102
<i>Chronology,</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Notes,</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Bibliography,</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Picture Credits,</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Author Credits,</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Index,</i>	<i>117</i>

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I am grateful to Kathy Beuson for her help.

INTRODUCTION



Between about 1916 and about 1940, the area of Manhattan named Harlem by the first Dutch settlers became synonymous with black culture. Up until the turn of the twentieth century, it had been a place of farms, country estates, and areas of recreation for wealthy whites from the more settled areas downtown.

Early in the 1900s, elevated train lines were extended up to Harlem, and real estate speculators envisioned a new suburb of downtown Manhattan. They built beautiful townhouses and apartment buildings on broad, tree-lined avenues. Then the real estate market declined, and rather than pay huge mortgages on empty buildings, the speculators started to rent to blacks for the first time.

The black population of New York was growing fast, fueled by a large northward migration of southerners. It could no longer be contained in the scattered black enclaves downtown. Blacks were desperate for living space and willing to pay the high rents of Harlem. Before long, Harlem had become the largest residential center for blacks in the United States.

Often called the capital of Black America, Harlem gave African American people a new sense of their own beauty and power. Black scholar Alain Locke asserted that it was the era of the “New Negro.” African Americans expressed pride in their history, style, and culture. Black writing, theater, music, and art thrived in a burst of creativity that came to be called the Harlem Renaissance.

Adding to the excitement was the fast and feverish era of American industrial development, coupled with the first *world* war in history. At just about the same time, the U.S. Congress passed the Volstead Act banning the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. When white mobsters opened up whites-only nightclubs selling illegal liquor in Harlem, white downtowners flocked to Harlem. But the Harlem Renaissance was primarily a movement led by brilliant black writers, thinkers, musicians, and artists.

African American intellectuals and artists were not solely a Harlem phenomenon. The blues and jazz flowered in cities like New Orleans, Kansas City, and Chicago. Atlanta and Washington, D.C., were important academic centers for blacks. But New York was the publishing and communications capital of the United States, and it followed that its black center would be in the forefront of the movement.

The Stock Market crash of 1929 was the beginning of the end of the Harlem Renaissance. White partiers did not want to see the poverty into which ordinary Harlemites sank during the Great Depression that followed. When Prohibition was repealed and liquor was again readily available, Harlem’s nightclubs ceased to hold much attraction. Increased mob violence and a well-publicized riot in 1935 completed the change in Harlem’s image from jazz-age playground to blighted ghetto. Yet its best scholars, writers, and musicians lived on, building careers and institutions.

The people who are profiled in the following pages are just some of the black stars of the Harlem Renaissance. They all contributed to the making of a legendary era. Some lived most of their lives in places

other than Harlem. Some had forged their careers before the Harlem Renaissance began. Others were just getting started. But their lives came together and flowered during this fabulous era in American history. Their dreams inspire us today.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

(1868–1963)



William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois, one of the greatest scholars the world has ever known, and leader of the New Negro movement, was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

His father, Alfred Du Bois, died before Will was old enough to remember him. His mother, Mary Silvina Du Bois, had to struggle to make ends meet for herself and her son.

When she passed away in 1884, young Du Bois went to work in a local mill. He continued to excel at Great Barrington High School, where he was the only black student. He graduated the same year his mother died. A few months later, the principal helped arrange a church scholarship for him to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Du Bois arrived at Fisk in the fall of 1885, and he never forgot his first day there: "It was to me an extraordinary experience," he wrote. "I was thrilled to be for the first time among so many people of my own color or rather of such various and such extraordinary colors. . . ."¹